

Revelation 17:1-18

"Bringing Down Babylon (part 1)"

Ch's 17 & 18 of the book of Rev are all about Babylon... Chronologically, Ch 16 brings us to the brink of the end of human history & connects us to Ch 19 whereby 2nd coming of Christ is ushered in, He crushes what remains of this world's rebellion & His millennial kingdom begins.

But before we get to that John wants to give us greater insight into the fall of this world's system both religiously & politically. In Vs 19 of Ch 16 you recall that as the 7th & final bowl of God's wrath was being poured out upon the earth that we read, "And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath." So already (back in Ch 14:8 & in Ch 16:19) we've seen the fall of Babylon proclaimed. Ch's 17-18 *detail* that fall.

Now before we jump w/both feet, headlong into this I suppose that we should take the time for a couple of minutes to develop the concept of Babylon & what the bible is talking about when Babylon is in view. Because throughout the OT Babylon was many things.

For instance we know that Babylon was the center of human civilization after the flood. We discover that in Gen 11 whereby after the flood mankind (all having 1 language) came together in order to build a city & a tower (the tower of Babel), which would reach to the heavens. It was all sort of facilitated (we learn in Gen Ch 10) by a man named Nimrod who organized mankind in this rebellion against God, building this tower in direct defiance of the Lord. The word "Babel" means "Gate of God", though it later came to be associated w/the idea of "confusion" after God confused man's languages there in Gen 10. So now when we say that someone is "Babbling" we mean they're uttering unintelligible sounds that make no sense. It derives that understanding from "Babel" when God confused man's language.

Several centuries later Babylon became the dominating world empire under Nebuchadnezzar; of course we discover that in the book of Daniel & in other biblical passages. So there's the city of Babel, there's the Empire of Babylon, but then it's also the nation that took the southern kingdom of Judah into captivity when Judah fell under the judgment of God & was exiled into *Babylon*.

You might find it interesting to know that Babylon is mentioned some 295 times (Babel mentioned twice) in scripture 2nd only to the city of Jerusalem.

Yet to those of you familiar w/the OT, you realize that Babylon is more than the seat of human civilization (found near the Euphrates River) after the flood. It's more than a dominating world Empire, more than the place that cruelly conquered Judah... Babylon, biblically, is associated specifically w/organized idolatry, blasphemy, rebellion against God & the persecution of God's people. As much as anything Babylon reflected and expressed what *the world* was all about.

The bible warns us again & again of the need to disconnect from the world & it's values. John tells us very directly, *"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world."*¹ In every time & in every culture there is what we might refer to as "the spirit of the age" that seeks to lead us *not* closer to God, but farther *away from* God. I mean, let's just keep it real, if we follow the ways & wants, the desires and drives of this world will it lead us closer to God, or further away from God?

Even so we can rightfully understand from a biblical perspective the common informal rebellion of mankind against God to be the "spirit" or "essence" of Babylon, the symbol (if you will) of Babylon in this world. We might go so far as to say (in simplistic/symbolic terms) that *Jerusalem* is the city of God's people & *Babylon* is the city of this world.

So understand that "Babylon" is far greater than Rev Ch 17-18, it's far greater than the kingdom of the A.C. The spirit of Babylon has roots that stem as far back (at least) as Genesis 10-11 if not much earlier expressed in Cain's murder of Abel.

The expression of Babylon was incredibly prominent in *John's* day as epitomized by Rome. It was Rome that dominated kings, that drove the world culture, that antagonized, & persecuted the people of God. Babylon is present *today* as expressed & exemplified by the world's system. Today we might say that Washington, or perhaps Hollywood drives the world culture, shapes the world view, promotes idolatry & sets the world's values more than any other city or place on the planet. Be that as it may the point I'm making is that the personification of Babylon is as *ancient* & as *present* as is sin itself.

So Babylon is expressed in man's collective (formal or informal) rebellion against God, idolatry &/or persecution of God's people.

¹ *The New King James Version*. 1982 (1 Jn 2:15-16). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

And the bible teaches that in the last days, prior to the return of J.C. that under the A.C. Babylon will hold authority over the earth like it never has before in both a religious & a commercial way. Ch 17 details the downfall of Babylon in the religious aspect; Ch 18 details the downfall of Babylon in the commercial aspect.

Vs 1-2

It's interesting that in Gen Ch 2 we find a pure bride in a lush garden setting, but by the time we reach the end of humanity, civilizations representation is reduced to a corrupted harlot in a barren wilderness... Again it's the net effect of sin upon the world. We spoke last week of the *lure* & what would sometimes seem to be *logic* of sin, yet how in the end that which promised to brighten your day only winds up burning you. Here we see again how that sin reduces mankind in corruption & barrenness & desensitizes man like alcohol does a drunkard.

We read that 1 of the 7 angels who had poured out the final 7 bowls of God's wrath upon the earth came to John & said that he would show John the destruction of the great harlot who sits on many waters w/whom the kings of the earth committed fornication & the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk w/the wine of her fornication.

Number of different things asserted here. We should take note of the fact that even before John sees what the angel describes to him, that the judgment of this great harlot is already affirmed. The destruction of this religious system that deceives & desensitizes the masses is never in question. There's never a doubt regarding the ultimate fate & failure of Babylon.

Why is Babylon here referred to as a "great harlot"? Well, it's because from God's perspective the worship of anyone or anything other than Himself is being spiritually unfaithful. Over & over again throughout the OT we see Israel as being identified as God's bride or God's betrothed. So whenever Israel would cease in their worship of the true God to go after false gods & the worship of idols God considers that fornication & unfaithfulness to Himself.

The true church (of whom the NT refers to as the "bride of Christ") is depicted in the scriptures as a pure virgin, chaste & clean. Yet this false religious system "Babylon the Great" is depicted as a harlot who has abandoned the truth & prostituted herself for personal gain & global influence. She sits on "many waters" of which we learn later on in the Ch represents all people, everywhere on the planet.

You see it's not spiritual things that people are no longer interested in. This world is fascinated by spiritual things. That's why there are so many movies on the paranormal & documentaries on ancient spiritual practices... What people are no longer interested in is the truth. You see, if I can gain a sense of self worth & yet maintain my own desire for sin & lack of accountability through spiritual means, then I'm all in. It's like killing every bird w/one stone. I can still sin, be justified in my own ungodly desires, gain a sense of spiritual worth & feel as though I've contributed to the greater good of the world all in one shot. It's not spiritual things that people aren't interested in, it's the truth they don't want. What does the bible say? *"Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron,"*²

Bible commentators are eager to pin this worldwide apostasy on the Roman Catholic church & certainly history points us to the fact (& even biblically we have reason to believe) that it will undoubtedly play a major role, but believe me friends this apostasy is much bigger than that which any single denomination or religious institution can absorb.

The kings of the earth commit fornication w/her, or enter into her proposal (there will be an unholy alliance of church & state) & the inhabitants of the earth are made drunk w/the wine of her fornication. This false religion will include all kinds of different "faiths", it'll be a "mixed bag" of the various religions of the world coming together under the banner of unity.

As far back as 1990 Pope John Paul II in addressing a prayer gathering of Christians, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists along w/others told participants that their efforts were, "unleashing profound spiritual energies in the world and bringing about a new climate of peace." The Pope pledged that "the Catholic Church intends to 'share in and promote' such ecumenical and inter-religious cooperation."

The Catholic Review commented on this and said, "The unity of religion promoted by the Holy Father Pope John Paul II and approved by His Holiness the Dalai Lama is not a goal to be achieved immediately, but a day may come when the love and compassion which both Buddha and Christ preached so eloquently will unite the world in a common effort to save humanity from senseless destruction, and leading to toward the light in which we all believe."

² The New King James Version. 1982 (1 Ti 4:1-2). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Karl Marx wasn't too far off when he said, "Religion is the opiate of the masses." More accurate would be to say that *empty* religion is the opium of the masses. They want a spiritual sense of self worth, they just don't want the truth. That Jesus is the Way, the truth & the Life & no one comes to the Father but through Him...

Vs 3-6

Words like "Power, wealth, pollution & persecution" summarize this "Great Harlot's" involvement on a worldwide scale. She pollutes the nations w/her filth & abomination (as pictured by the golden cup in her hand) & persecutes those who belong to the Lord. **As a matter of fact she revels in the blood of the saints & the martyrs of Jesus as a drunk revels in his/her alcohol. It makes her high, she likes it, it gives her a "buzz" & it made John "marvel".**

You see John was accustomed to seeing *pagan's* persecute Christians, but to see a self proclaimed church, masquerading as a representative of God putting to death & shedding the blood of believers in J.C. blew his mind...

John gives us a very vivid description of this false religious system of the last days. 1st of all he tells us that she rides the scarlet beast that has 7 heads, 10 horns & is full of names of blasphemy. We've seen this beast before back in Ch 13 whom we've already identified as the A.C. This tells us that initially this religious system will be supported by the A.C. & even seem to have a dominating influence over him. She (for all intents & purposes) wields the reigns.

It's a very common thing in the political world for politicians to use religious means to aid & accomplish their personal agenda. **Of course this points many people to Roman Catholicism because there's no doubt that the pope carries the single largest "religious influence" in world politics today. Virtually every major world power convenes w/the pope at various times throughout their stay in office.**

We see the wealth of the religious system (again hinting potentially to Roman Catholicism) as she's arrayed in purple & scarlet (not fine, bright, white linen) the colors of power & royalty, gold, precious stones & pearls.

The woman herself (John tells us in Vs 18) is the great city which reigns (present tense) over the kings of the earth. Of course the city which reigned over the kings of the earth in John's day was none other than Rome... powerful, prosperous, yet idolatrous & dangerous.

Now I should say this again as we keep name dropping the Roman Catholic church throughout this Ch.

This system is much larger than any one religious institution, nor does it mean that every Roman Catholic is somehow deceived. There are some wonderful, God fearing people in the Catholic church today, & there are some radically deceived people in the protestant church today. **Any true believer will have been raptured at this point; what's left over will be the residue of all false religions & deceived people whether they be Catholic, protestant, Hindu, Islamic or whatever...** We're merely suggesting that since the A.C. will need a cult following from a pseudo "church", that it would appear as though the banner of the Roman Catholic church may lead the charge. But no true believers will be a part of this system.

But outwardly it will fare sumptuously, have riches & luxury. However, truthfully she's nothing more than a corrupt & unclean prostitute (God makes that clear). That's the difference between man's perspective & the reality of truth that God exposes for us.

On her forehead a name was written... In ancient Rome a common practice for prostitutes would be to wear their name on a headband. Here we see the true identification of this "woman".

"Mystery, Babylon The Great, The Mother of Harlots, And Of The Abominations Of The Earth." All false religions trace their roots in some way, shape or form back to Babylon. Babylon has given birth to all false religions. "Mystery" a spiritual truth that can't be known unless God reveals it. This mystery has to do w/Babylon.

That city founded by Nimrod in an effort to defy & rebel against God... Think about this, Nimrod was only the great grandson of Noah... Not that far removed; he married a woman by the name of Semmiramis who founded the Babylonian religion, she was the high priestess of idol worship. **She gave birth to a son whom she claimed was conceived miraculously (false fulfillment of Gen 3:15). The son's name was "Tammuz", who according to Babylonian legend was out hunting & was killed by a wild beast, but 3 days later rose from the dead & was hailed as a Savior.** There are all kinds of artifacts that remain to this day that picture Semmiramis holding her "savior son", predating Christianity by centuries. Interesting Satanic kind of counterfeit isn't it?

Btw, the Canaanite name for the Babylonian Tammuz? "Baal". Jeremiah 44:19 informs us of how the ancient Babylonians used to refer to Semmiramis; they called her "the queen of heaven", made cakes & burned incense to her.

But Babylon is the seedbed of all false religions, the mother of all harlots...

... Larger than any one branch of a religious institution, the embodiment of Satan's own ecumenical movement; the religion of the world system.

Vs 7-8

The A.C. will blow the minds of the unsaved. Those, "whose names are not written in the Book of Life." We see here that he was, and is not, & will ascend out of the bottomless pit" & his end will be perdition, or destruction. This is exactly what we learned in Ch 11:7 & Ch 13:3-8. This same demonic entity that will possess the A.C. had possessed a world ruler previously but wasn't in power presently when John was writing. Most believe (& I would concur) it would be a reference to Caesar Nero, who went on a Satanic rampage after Paul the apostle appeared before him. **It's believed that Paul shared the gospel w/him, he rejected the gospel, became demonically possessed & then persecuted Christians in unparalleled ways. So, this spirit of A.C. was,... is not... (currently in the abyss), will come out of the bottomless pit to possess the A.C. & will lead astray those who've rejected the love of the truth & they will be given to the lie.**

However ultimately he will find his place in the lake of fire (he will go to perdition.

Vs 9-11

Ok, let's not pretend that this is a super simple passage, quite frankly it's not. Those who want to the heads of the beast as Rome point out that Rome is historically identified as the city of 7 hills. (I may've pointed to something like that in the past myself). However the word John uses here is literally Mts, not hills (there is a Greek word for hills).

It may be more accurate (though I'm certainly not dogmatic on the issue) to see the 7 Mts (of Vs 9) as representing the kings/kingdoms in conjunction w/Vs 10 (we know that the bible has spoken of mountains as a figure of government before (Dan 2:35).

If that be the case we see in Vs 10 that 5 kingdoms had passed from the scene. Those would be Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia & Greece. ... "One is" that would be "Rome".

One is yet to come, which would be the revived Roman Empire (again probably not called that, more like the European Economic Community or something to that extent). It will be on the scene for a short time, the A.C. will be integral in establishing it (politically) then will himself seize control (will become the 8th & is of the 7) & will go to perdition.

Now again I'm not saying that even that outlook is w/out it's problems, it's simply a difficult passage for us presently. Those on the earth at the time (which we don't want to be) will see it all unfold very clearly.

Vs 12-15

So we see (according to Vs 12) there will be a 10 nation confederation that will aid in the establishment of the A.C. in global domination. Remember when the 1st seal was broken that we noted the rise to power of the A.C. was initially through diplomacy & peace talks. It's not till a little later that the ravages of war come to pass.

So these 10 kings will yield their authority to him willingly; but eventually he will break all his promises of peace, ravage the world, & demand to be worshiped as God. So he's 1 of the 7 kingdoms but in usurping absolute authority he becomes the 8th.

As for these 10 kings they will join him in warring against Christ at the battle of the great day of God Almighty, also referred to in Ch 16 as Armageddon but as John points out here in Vs 14 their efforts are futile. Christ will overcome them for He is the King of kings & Lord of lords & those who are w/Him (that would be me & you btw) are called "chosen" & "faithful".

Time forbids but suffice it to say for now that if you're in Christ, rejoice, you didn't choose Him, He chose you & appointed you that you should bear much fruit & that your fruit should remain. If you're not in Christ, surrender to Him today & you'll discover that He chose you as well. As for the title "faithful", it's nothing I have earned nor deserve, but thank God that having begun a good work in me God will be faithful to complete it until the Day of J.C. How we long to hear those words, "Well done, good & *faithful* servant, you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many, enter into the joy of your Lord."

Vs 16-18

These 10 kings will hate the harlot, Why? Because of her moral depravity? No because they stand in their way ultimately. This is the judgment of the great harlot, the beast who initially supported her will turn on her (most probably at the ½ point of the great tribulation) when he's gotten everything he wants out of her. Then when he declares himself to *be* God & demands to be worshiped *as* God, this religious system will be in his way. This is where this false religion discovers the true nature of the beast, anything that represents or seeks to support any "god" other than himself will be torn to shreds, the make her desolate & naked, eat her flesh & burn her w/fire.

Utter destruction; again this is the nature of sin. Initially the woman rode the beast, seemed to control it, but eventually the beast destroyed her. Listen to me, any sin you seek to control rather than confess (& repent of) will disgrace, devour & destroy your life.

Oh we may ride that sin for a season; arrayed in pearls, precious stones & purple robes; but eventually, like the great harlot, we will be burned, eaten up, disgraced & made desolate by the very sin we thought we controlled.

“For God has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose.” Throughout the bible we see where God will use one wicked group, to be an instrument of judgment against another wicked group. Here God gives the world exactly what it wants, godless religion leading to godless rulers.

“The woman whom you saw, *is* that great city which *reigns* (currently) over the kings of the earth...Rome.

But lets back up & finish where we started. Babylon (in the sense of the world system) has always been that “great city which reigns over the kings of the earth”. The question for the Christian is, “Does it reign over me?”

Let me put it like this: Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth & the life, no one comes to the Father except through Me.” Do those words offend you? Or do they comfort you?

Prayer Points:

Father as You have caused us to pause and witness the destruction of the religious aspect of Babylon we’re reminded once again that nothing is able to separate us from Your love. Though their may be persecution or trying times presently, ultimately, eternally You will cause us to overcome & be more than conquerors through Christ who has loved us & given Himself for us. God give us discernment as it pertains to the subtleties of the enemy, that we not be in anyway deceived but that we follow You wholeheartedly.

If you’re not sure today to which kingdom you belong, in which city your citizenship lies, the worldly city of Babylon or the heavenly city of the new Jerusalem let me encourage you to make your calling & election sure today. This world is passing away, along w/the lusts of it, but he who does the will of God will abide forever. Even so it’s the will of God that none should perish but that all should come to repentance, to turn from your sin & surrender your life to Christ who has shed His blood, died upon the cross for your sin & rose again 3 days later that you might stand justified before God by faith in Him.